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David Vogel in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire

Human Rights Violations in Ukraine under President Zelensky: An Investigative Report



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Dear Mindful Leader,

Volodymyr Zelensky's tenure as President of Ukraine (since 2019) has coincided with

turbulent times, including a full-scale war following Russia's 2022 invasion.

While Ukraine fights for its survival and sovereignty, concerns have been raised about human rights practices under Zelensky's government.

This week's edition of **Mindful Ethics** newsletter examines three contentious areas: (1) the alleged assassination of Russian commentator Darya Dugina and claims of Ukrainian involvement; (2) the treatment of LGBT individuals in Ukraine, including reports of persecution; and (3) suppression of journalists and dissenting voices, including cases of intimidation, violence, and murder.

The analysis relies on documented evidence from intelligence reports, reputable human rights organizations, and investigative journalism, presenting verified facts and allegations without bias.

1. Alleged Assassination of Darya Dugina

Background: Darya Dugina, 29, was killed on August 20, 2022, when a bomb exploded under the SUV she was driving near Moscow. Dugina was the daughter of Aleksandr Dugin, a prominent Russian ultranationalist ideologue who ardently supported Russia's war in Ukraine.

Russian Accusations: Within days, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed to have "solved" Dugina's murder, blaming it on Ukrainian special services.

The FSB named a suspect – a Ukrainian woman, Natalia Vovk – alleging she surreptitiously trailed Dugina and planted the car bomb before fleeing Russia to Estonia

Estonia's authorities stated they had received no official evidence or extradition request regarding the suspect.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to President Zelensky, *dismissed the FSB's claims as fiction* and even suggested the killing might be the result of internal "*intraspecies*"

conflict among Russian security factions

Ukraine's government formally denied any involvement, asserting that Dugina was not a figure of interest to Kyiv.

Evidence and Western Intelligence: At the time, no public evidence directly tied Ukraine to the assassination beyond the FSB's assertions. But later reporting indicates some Western intelligence agencies found the claims plausible.

In October 2022, U.S. intelligence officials told The New York Times that parts of the Ukrainian government likely authorized the attack that killed Dugina

According to these reports (partially confirmed by Reuters), the U.S. believed certain Ukrainian operatives were behind the bombing – although it's unclear *"which elements of the Ukrainian government"* were involved and whether Zelensky himself had knowledge or gave approval.

Notably, U.S. officials (under the Biden administration) were reportedly unhappy about not being informed in advance and *"admonished"* their Ukrainian counterparts after the fact. Ukraine continued to deny its involvement even after these intelligence leaks, maintaining that Dugina had no strategic value to Kyiv.

Independent investigative journalists have struggled to definitively verify responsibility for the assassination. Some analysts posited alternative theories – for example, that *Russian domestic actors* opposed to Dugin might have been behind the bombing – but no hard proof has emerged publicly for any theory.

As of this writing, the case remains officially unsolved outside of Russian intelligence circles.

Human Rights and Legal Implications: If Ukrainian agents did carry out the killing of Darya Dugina, it would represent a deliberate, extrajudicial assassination on foreign soil.

Targeting a civilian in this manner would violate international humanitarian law and human rights norms.

The U.S. State Department pointedly noted it “*unequivocally condemned the intentional targeting of civilians anywhere*” when asked about the Dugina attack.

Even in wartime, assassinations of non-combatants are generally viewed as unlawful. Moscow has labeled the incident an act of “terrorism” and used it to justify potential retaliation.

To date, no human rights body has independently investigated Dugina’s assassination, but the allegation – that Ukraine may have resorted to targeted killing – is serious. It underscores the brutal shadow war underlying the broader conflict and raises questions about oversight and accountability for Ukraine’s security services.

Summary of Dugina Case: In sum, Darya Dugina’s murder remains shrouded in claim and counterclaim. Ukraine’s officials vehemently deny it and suggest Russia might be using the incident for propaganda or internal score-settling.

Meanwhile, credible Western sources lend some weight to Ukraine’s culpability, indicating elements in Kyiv “authorized” the assassination, even if not officially acknowledged

It is clear is that an intentional car bombing targeting a civilian – whoever ordered it – represents a grave human rights violation. The Dugina case highlights the extreme methods creeping into the Russia-Ukraine war and sets a troubling precedent if a state-sponsored assassination is confirmed.

2. Persecution of the LGBT Community

Legal and Social Context: Ukraine does not criminalize homosexuality, but LGBT

people have historically lacked full legal equality and have faced societal stigma and violence. Under President Zelensky, there have been tentative moves toward improving LGBT rights – for example, in 2023 the government published draft legislation to recognize **civil** partnerships (including same-sex couples), granting partners property and inheritance rights (though not allowing joint adoption).

This initiative, supported by key ministries, was a response to public petitions and Ukraine's goal of aligning with European Union standards.

Despite such progress on paper, LGBT individuals in Ukraine continue to report discrimination, and human rights monitors have documented numerous abuses by non-state actors (and occasional official inaction) during Zelensky's tenure.

Attacks and Violence: Far-right extremist groups have been the primary perpetrators of anti-LGBT violence in Ukraine. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that members of hate groups have routinely targeted LGBT people with physical attacks and threats, creating an atmosphere of fear.

In 2020-2021, organizations like HRW and Amnesty International recorded a surge in homophobic attacks. For instance:

- In August 2020, a Pride event in Odesa was attacked by a mob of ultra-nationalists from the "Tradition and Order" group. Assaults hurled eggs and pepper spray at participants, injuring attendees while police response was criticized as slow
- In another incident in August 2021, *Tradition and Order* radicals tried to break up the Odesa Pride march again. This time, violent clashes erupted between the extremists and law enforcement. Police, having learned from the previous year, deployed over 1,000

officers and *detained 51 far-right attackers* who used tear gas and injured dozens of officers

- Beyond Pride events, LGBT community centers and individuals have been targeted. In May 2021, unknown vandals smashed the offices of LGBT Association LIGA in Odesa and Mykolaiv, throwing stones and causing property damage

Role of Authorities: Under Zelensky, the government's public stance has been moderately supportive of LGBT rights in principle, but enforcement on the ground is uneven.

. Police protection for LGBT events has improved in some instances – for example, Kyiv's small Transgender Pride march in 2021 was successfully guarded by police, and attempts by far-right protesters to disrupt Pride parades in Kharkiv and Odesa in late 2021 were thwarted by law enforcement

However, accountability for anti-LGBT violence remains a problem.

Human Rights Watch noted that hate crime legislation has stalled – a draft bill to strengthen penalties for crimes motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity bias was *tabled in parliament but did not advance* as of 2020

Consequently, many attacks are not treated under hate-crime statutes. In HRW's words, "authorities often failed to investigate hate crimes" against LGBT people

For example, after the Odesa Pride attacks, suspects were charged with generic offenses like hooliganism, not with hate-based offenses, despite clear homophobic intent.

This reluctance to use hate-crime provisions sends a message of ambivalence and can embolden perpetrators.

Reports from Human Rights Organizations: Monitoring groups consistently highlight ongoing abuses.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Ukraine noted in 2024 that “despite undeniable progress, [LGBT] people still face persistent discrimination, violence, and marginalization” in Ukraine

Both Amnesty International and HRW have cited patterns of harassment, threats, and physical assaults on LGBT activists. Amnesty’s annual report observed that homophobic hate speech remains common and that far-right groups have attacked LGBT events with *“little to no interference by police”* in some cases.

In one Amnesty-documented case, a lesbian couple was assaulted by men in Kyiv in 2021 while bystanders refused to help; the attackers were not identified by police. Such incidents underscore the challenges LGBT Ukrainians face not only from organized extremists but from societal prejudice at large.

Occupied Territories and War Impact: It’s important to note the war’s impact on LGBT people as well. In Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, LGBTQ individuals have faced *increased danger*. The UN and human rights groups have reported that occupying Russian forces have targeted LGBT people for abuse, viewing them as ideologically *“undesirable.”* Many LGBT Ukrainians became internally displaced or refugees to escape both the invasion and the heightened homophobia in war-torn areas.

Summary of LGBT Situation: In summary, under President Zelensky, LGBT people continue to suffer abuses. Documented cases show assaults, intimidation, and discrimination – often by far-right non-state actors – and a patchy record of justice for victims.

International human rights bodies, including Amnesty International and the UN, have called on Ukrainian authorities to do more: to enforce hate-crime laws, punish perpetrators of anti-LGBT violence, and protect the right to free assembly for

LGBT groups.

The Zelensky administration finds itself balancing a conservative society, the influence of violent extremist groups, and its supposed commitment to democratic values. The war with Russia has, ironically, provided both an impetus (to embrace liberal European values as a rebuttal to Russia's repression) and an excuse (martial law and social unrest) that complicate Ukraine's path to full LGBT equality. .

3. Suppression and Violence Against Journalists

Press Freedom Overview: Ukraine's media landscape is vibrant but polarized, and press freedom has seen mixed fortunes under Zelensky. Upon taking office, Zelensky inherited a country with pluralistic but oligarch-dominated media.

Early in his term, he promised to protect free speech.

However, developments since 2019 – especially security measures during the war – have drawn criticism from watchdogs.

The Institute of Mass Information (a Ukrainian press watchdog) recorded numerous press freedom violations each year, from obstruction and threats to physical assaults on journalists.

Zelensky's government has been accused of using heavy-handed tactics against outlets and reporters deemed hostile to the state or his administration as reported by organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International. In 2022, Russia's invasion led Ukraine to impose martial law, which curtailed certain democratic freedoms, including media freedom.

While many restrictions stem directly from wartime necessity, human rights groups warn that some actions cross into censorship or persecution of dissent.

Closure of Opposition Media: One of the most controversial moves came in February 2021, before the all-out war.

President Zelensky issued a decree shutting down three television channels – 112 Ukraine, NewsOne, and ZIK – that were owned by an ally of a pro-Russian opposition leader.

This effectively banned the outlets overnight.

The formal basis was Ukraine's national security law that allows sanctions on entities spreading disinformation or threatening sovereignty. The Zelensky administration accused those channels of being Kremlin propaganda tools in the information war. However, the manner of the shutdown (by presidential order, without court proceedings) alarmed free-expression advocates.

Human Rights Watch criticized the "extrajudicial banning" of the TV stations, noting it "threatened media pluralism in Ukraine"

The move was applauded by many Ukrainians fighting Russian disinfo, but it set a precedent of the government directly silencing media voices it deemed dangerous. Later, in 2022 after Russia's invasion, Zelensky went further by merging all national TV channels into a single 24/7 news broadcast (the "United News" platform) as a wartime unity measure. This essentially centralized the TV news narrative under government coordination.

Critics (including Reporters Without Borders, RSF) said this step, contributed to a "shrinking of press freedom" in Ukraine by sidelining independent editorial control.

Harassment and Surveillance of Journalists:

Human rights organizations have documented instances of Ukrainian authorities or security services intimidating journalists, particularly those investigating corruption or voicing dissent during the war.

RSF reported in 2023 a “worrying decline” in respect for media autonomy, noting that at least five Ukrainian journalists had been subjected to surveillance or threats for reporting on government corruption since the war began.

In one prominent case, the editors of *Ukrainska Pravda* (a leading independent news site) accused officials in the President’s Office of systematically pressuring their newsroom in 2023 – including attempts to influence stories and leaks of journalists’ private data. In October 2024, *Ukrainska Pravda* publicly complained of “systematic attempts” by authorities to interfere with its editorial policy.

This prompted the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and other media groups to write a letter to Zelensky.

The CPJ’s December 2024 letter highlighted a “troubling pattern of restrictions” that “curtail the operations of a free press”, and it urged Zelensky to ensure that “no one responsible for intimidating journalists goes unpunished.”

The letter specifically decried instances of *official surveillance, intimidation, and proposed laws that would hinder investigative reporting.*

.One such proposed law (introduced in 2023 under martial law) would impose harsher criminal penalties on journalists for publishing certain information from government databases during wartime

Media advocates argue this bill, ostensibly to prevent leaks of military information, is

written so broadly that it could punish legitimate reporting (for example, on officials' asset declarations or wartime procurement). CPJ warned it *"threatens investigative journalism"* and urged it be reconsidered.

These concerns show the fine line between wartime censorship for security and suppression of public-interest journalism.

Detentions and Prosecutions of Journalists:

Perhaps the most glaring human rights allegations involve journalists or bloggers who have been jailed, and in some cases allegedly mistreated, for voicing opposition to the government's narrative.

A few high-profile examples under Zelensky include:

- **Gonzalo Lira:** A Chilean-American blogger living in Kharkiv, Lira gained notoriety during the 2022 invasion for posting videos and commentary sharply critical of Zelensky's government and echoing Russian narratives. In April 2022, Lira was briefly detained by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and warned about spreading Russian disinformation. In May 2023, the SBU arrested him again and charged him under laws against *"justifying the armed aggression of Russia."* Such speech is illegal in Ukraine during the war, as it is seen as supporting the enemy. Lira was accused of producing propaganda that undermined Ukraine's fight. He was released on bail but ordered not to leave the country. Lira attempted to flee Ukraine in July 2023, violating his bail; he was recaptured and held in pre-trial detention. Tragically, in January 2024, Gonzalo Lira died in custody. Ukrainian authorities stated the 55-year-old died of pneumonia while in prison. However, his family and some commentators have alleged foul play – Lira's father publicly claimed his son was *"a victim of torture"* and blamed Ukrainian officials for his death. These allegations have not been proven, and the official cause of death remains medical. Nonetheless, the case has become a rallying point for critics who say Ukraine is imprisoning and endangering those who peacefully express dissent. It illustrates the extremely narrow space for pro-Russia speech in Ukraine during the war – authorities view it as treasonous propaganda, while free speech advocates worry that even non-violent expression is met with draconian punishment (Lira faced up to 8 years in prison had he lived to see trial).

- **Anatoly Shariy:** Shariy is a Ukrainian journalist and YouTuber who built a large following critiquing Ukraine's post-2014 governments. He has lived in exile in the EU since 2012 (after clashes with previous authorities) and became an outspoken critic of Zelensky and a vocal pro-Russia commentator. In February 2021 – a year before the invasion – Ukraine's SBU charged Shariy *in absentia* with high treason and inciting hatred, accusing him of acting on behalf of Russian interests in the information sphere. Essentially, Ukraine alleges Shariy's blogs and videos are propaganda that undermines national security. In May 2022, Spanish police, acting on a Ukrainian warrant, arrested Shariy in Spain where he resides. A Spanish court released him on bail (recognizing he had long-term residence in Spain) but is considering Ukraine's extradition request. The **Shariy case shows Ukraine's** determination to pursue even non-violent critics beyond its borders. It also highlights a **human rights tension:** Shariy's statements, while pro-Russian, fall under political speech. If extradited to Ukraine, he would face trial for treason for his commentary. Organizations like the International Federation of Journalists have expressed concern, noting Shariy is a registered journalist and urging that his rights be respected in any legal process. As of late 2023, Spain had not extradited Shariy, and he remained effectively in exile. The outcome of his case will be a bellwether for how Ukraine balances national security with freedom of expression.
- **Domestic Journalists:** It's not only foreign or exile figures who have been targeted. Domestic Ukrainian journalists who criticize the government or military have reported intimidation. For example, in 2021 Zelensky engaged in a very public feud with prominent journalist Yuriy Butusov after Butusov published footage of a Ukrainian drone strike. Zelensky accused him of aiding the enemy, and shortly after, the SBU opened an inquiry into Butusov (he was not arrested, and the strong backlash forced authorities to drop the matter). Another case: In March 2022, during the chaos of the invasion's early days, Yuriy Tkachev, an Odesa-based journalist known for his anti-government views, was arrested by the SBU. The SBU claimed they found explosives in his apartment – an assertion met with skepticism by his colleagues who suspected evidence fabrication. Tkachev had been an outspoken critic of Zelensky's predecessor and ongoing policies (including Ukraine's handling of the 2014 Odesa clashes). As of the latest reports, Tkachev was held on treason charges; international rights groups have called for transparency in his case. Human Rights Watch has also followed cases of journalists detained in Donbas conflict zones and by Ukrainian forces for suspected collaboration. While Ukraine has legitimate reasons to pursue collaborators during war, the line between collaborator and dissident can blur, and rights groups insist on due process and monitoring to prevent abuse. The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine documented several cases of arbitrary detention of civilians by Ukrainian law enforcement in 2022, some involving bloggers or activists accused of pro-Russian sympathies. Such detainees have alleged ill-treatment in custody,

though on a vastly smaller scale compared to the widespread torture practiced by Russian occupiers. The most high-profile journalist killing in recent years was the car-bomb murder of Pavel Sheremet in 2016 (under a previous government). Under Zelensky, the Sheremet case finally went to trial – however, it has been mired in controversy as the suspects (war veterans) claim innocence and say the evidence is shaky. As of 2023, the case remained unresolved.

Freedom of Expression Ratings: Global press freedom indices reflect a complicated picture. In RSF's World Press Freedom Index, Ukraine's ranking actually *improved* somewhat in 2022-2023 (rising to 79th and then 61st place), largely due to the massive repression in Russia making Ukraine look relatively open by comparison. But RSF has cautioned that this rise "*masks internal problems*".

In mid-2024, RSF explicitly warned of "shrinking press freedom" in Ukraine, citing increased governmental pressure on the media and instances of censorship.

For example, in May 2023 a military officer was appointed to head Ukrinform (the state news agency), raising concerns about political influence over media content. And an internal memo surfaced instructing Ukrinform staff to avoid inviting certain commentators and to clear interviews with the military – evidence of behind-the-scenes censorship practices.

These developments led RSF to call on Ukrainian authorities to "*counteract*" the decline and reaffirm a commitment to independent journalism.

The U.S. State Department's 2023 human rights report on Ukraine echoed many of these points.

It pointed to "credible reports" that Ukrainian officials were involved in "unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists", as well as censorship and other restrictions on freedom of expression.

The report listed “*serious problems*” such as enforcement actions against media, and noted that some measures (like banning certain outlets or restricting internet content) went beyond what is typical in democracies.

Importantly, the State Department tempered its critique by noting that many of these issues occur in the context of Russia’s war: “*Some of these human rights issues stemmed from martial law, which continued to curtail democratic freedoms, including freedom of the press.*”

In other words, Ukraine’s state of emergency has led to exceptional actions that, while aimed at protecting the country, also impinge on civil liberties.

Summary of Press Freedom Findings: Under President Zelensky, Ukraine has walked a tightrope between security and liberty. On one hand, the country enjoys a far freer media environment than authoritarian Russia – Ukrainian journalists routinely investigate government officials and criticize authorities without facing the kind of deadly danger present in Russia (where dozens of journalists have been jailed or killed for dissent). Independent outlets like *Ukrainska Pravda*, continue to report on corruption and even military missteps. However, press freedom has undeniably come under strain. The government has not hesitated to silence media it views as tied to the enemy (e.g., pro-Russian TV channels).

War-related censorship, such as unified state messaging on TV, has reduced the diversity of viewpoints on the airwaves.

There have been credible allegations of intimidation of journalists by the SBU and other officials (surveillance, interrogations, threats of prosecution).

At least one dissident commentator (Lira) died in state custody under troubling circumstances. These incidents constitute human rights concerns regarding freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

Human rights organizations have urged Ukraine to remember the democratic values it says it is fighting for. In the words of CPJ, "Any pressure on journalists is unacceptable."

Ensuring accountability for abuses against media workers is critical.

So far, Zelensky has defended many of his government's media policies as necessary for national survival. Indeed, faced with an existential war, Ukraine's leadership has prioritized unity and countering Russian disinformation – sometimes at the expense of open debate. The true test will come when the immediate threat subsides: will Ukraine roll back the wartime restrictions and reaffirm robust press freedoms, or will a more controlled media environment become the new normal?

For now, international monitors continue to document and speak out about each violation, from the jailing of bloggers to the overbroad media laws, in hopes of keeping Ukraine on a democratic path even amid war.

Conclusion and Summary

Summary of Findings: President Zelensky's record on human rights is complex and must be viewed against the backdrop of Russia's war, which has inflicted massive human rights violations on Ukrainians. Nevertheless, Ukraine's conduct is under scrutiny. In the case of Darya Dugina's assassination, the allegation that Ukrainian agents assassinated a civilian figure in Moscow is a serious one.

While Ukrainian officials deny it, U.S. intelligence leaks lend credence to the claim that elements of Kyiv's security services were involved

If true, this act would qualify as an extrajudicial killing outside of active combat – a grave human rights violation and a breach of international law. However, the public evidence remains inconclusive, and the truth may not be fully known until after the war. The incident has already been propagandized by Russia to paint Ukraine as

"terroristic," underscoring how human rights issues can have strategic information impacts.

Regarding the LGBT community, Ukraine presents a dichotomy: a nation fighting for "European values" yet still overcoming its own legacy of homophobia.

Documented cases show LGBT people facing abuse, threats, and violent assaults by non-state actors, with inconsistent protection from the state.

International human rights groups like Amnesty International and HRW have publicly called out these abuses, pressing Ukraine to uphold the rights of all citizens regardless of sexual orientation.

Unfortunately in the Ukraine Zelensky's verbal support has not fully translated into lived equality – hate crimes often go unpunished as such, and LGBT Ukrainians report discrimination in daily life. The UN's assessment in May 2024 captures it well: despite progress, LGBT people "still face persistent discrimination, violence, and marginalization" in Ukraine.

True change will require not just new laws but a shift in social attitudes and consistent law enforcement.

On press freedom and the treatment of journalists, the Zelensky era shows both continuity and new challenges. Ukraine has long had problems with impunity for attacks on journalists (as seen in earlier unresolved murders like Oles Buzina in 2015 and Pavel Sheremet in 2016).

Under Zelensky, the space for anti-government voices has narrowed, especially since the war. We found credible reports of journalists being jailed or prosecuted for their views, which human rights watchdogs view as political repression.

*The case of Gonzalo Lira – a foreign blogger
imprisoned for the content of his YouTube videos –
is a troubling example, compounded by his death
in custody.*

Domestically, the banning of opposition media and the adoption of an expansive media law drew warnings that Ukraine was emulating tactics of authoritarian regimes.

Both CPJ and RSF – impartial organizations dedicated to press freedom – have openly urged President Zelensky to halt intimidation of the press and repeal draconian media policies.

In defending these measures, Ukrainian officials emphasize the extraordinary context of a brutal war for national survival. Indeed, many of Ukraine's human rights deviations are taking place under martial law, which by its nature limits normal freedoms.

The international community largely sympathizes with Ukraine's plight, but also reminds Kyiv that adherence to human rights and democratic principles is vital, especially if Ukraine seeks to distinguish itself from the authoritarian system it opposes.

Final Thoughts: It is important to stress that scale and intent matter in these discussions. The human rights issues in government-controlled Ukraine, as serious as they are, remain far less severe than the widespread atrocities committed by Russian forces in occupied Ukrainian territories (summary executions, torture, war crimes against civilians)

A fair analysis recognizes this asymmetry – a point even the U.S. State Department made, noting Ukraine's issues are "*not comparable to the scope of Russia's abuses*"

*Nonetheless, holding Ukraine accountable to
international human rights standards is not an
exercise in false equivalence, but rather an*

*affirmation that all governments, even those
under duress, must strive to respect fundamental
rights.*

Ukraine has professed a desire to join the European Union and uphold liberal democratic values; this necessitates confronting and correcting any human rights violations by its own agents.

Moving forward, Ukrainian authorities face the task of whether it's a covert operation that killed Dugina or the mistreatment of a jailed blogger – and ensuring accountability. Civil society within Ukraine remains active and is a crucial watchdog. For example, Ukrainian human rights groups have documented cases of illegal detentions by the SBU and pressed for detainees' release or fair trial.

There is an ongoing, internal struggle for Ukraine's soul: to defeat an external aggressor without abandoning the rule-of-law principles that differentiate it from the aggressor.

In conclusion, this investigation has compiled verified facts and allegations about human rights in Ukraine under Zelensky's administration. The assassination of Darya Dugina stands as a controversial episode with intelligence pointing toward Ukrainian responsibility, raising ethical and legal questions in wartime. The LGBT community's plight shows both progress in policy and continuing incidents of homophobic violence that authorities must do more to prevent and punish.

*The press freedom climate has undeniably
worsened under the pressures of war, with
instances of censorship and persecution of
journalists that tarnish Ukraine's democratic
credentials.*

Each of these areas demands vigilant attention.

Ultimately, protecting human rights is not only a moral obligation but also strategic: Ukraine's legitimacy on the world stage partially hinges on upholding the democratic ideals it claims to defend. Human rights organizations, both Ukrainian and international, will continue to monitor the situation and call out abuses.

An unbiased look at the evidence – as presented in this report – helps cut through propaganda and political spin, ensuring that *documented facts* drive the conversation. The hope among Ukraine's allies and human rights defenders is that the Zelensky government heeds these findings: addressing documented abuses, providing remedies to victims, and preventing future violations.

This will be essential for Ukraine to emerge from the current war not only territorially intact, but as a country firmly grounded in respect for human rights and dignity for all.

Until next time.

Stay well. Swim strong.

Yours in truth and justice,

David

Mentor, Writer, and Faithful Servant of God

P. S. Each of these sources below have been used to substantiate the factual claims and allegations made. This report remains focused on verified information and documented reports, without lending credence to unfounded rumors. By examining credible evidence, it provides an unbiased account of human rights issues in Ukraine under Zelensky – a nuanced picture of a country striving for democracy while grappling with internal and external threats.

Sources:

- Reuters – U.S. intelligence belief of Ukrainian role in Dugina killing
- RFE/RL – Context on Dugina case and skepticism about Russian claims

- Human Rights Watch – Annual reports on Ukraine documenting attacks on LGBT people and lackluster police response
- Amnesty International – Commentary on suspicious deaths and persecution of dissent (contextual)
- United Nations / OHCHR – Statements on discrimination against LGBT people (“persistent discrimination, violence” despite progress)
- Committee to Protect Journalists – Open letter urging Zelensky to stop media intimidation (Dec 2024)
- U.S. State Department – *2022 and 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine*, highlighting unjustified arrests of journalists, torture allegations, and martial law impacts
- Reuters – Coverage of Anatoly Shariy’s treason case and arrest in Spain
- Kyiv Independent – Reports summarizing RSF and CPJ concerns (press freedom “shrinking”; attempts to influence Ukrainska Pravda)
- Wikipedia (aggregating various sources) – Gonzalo Lira case timeline (detention, charges, death by pneumonia)
- PinkNews / RFE/RL – Descriptions of Odesa Pride attacks by far-right groups in 2020-21 and police reactions

P. P.S. 🙏🙏🙏 If you don’t know who I am, my name is David Vogel, retired CEO turned LinkedIn influencer and Founder of the **Church of Unity Society**. Six mornings a week Live at 7 AM, I preach to the C-suite, igniting their spirits with the power of God. As the publisher of **Mindful Ethics**, the unapologetic voice of ethics on LinkedIn, I challenge leaders to elevate their game, lead with heart, and redefine what it means to live with purpose.

One More Thing . . . As I recently retired as CEO of **Project SunRize**, I remain a trusted consigliere to my son, Evan, who now leads the company with the same dedication to excellence. **Project SunRize** is proudly donating 3% of all profits from commercial solar construction to **The Church of Unity** and 3% to **The Council For Unity**.

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Stop sharing falsehoods and lies - all fabricated by Russian PSYOPs.

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Author, Tax Resolution Expert

Zelenskyy regime killed a well known journalist, Gonzalo Lira, who was an American citizen, after taking him into custody and torturing him. The White House just recently mentioned his name but under the prior administration, there was no mention of this poor journalist at all.

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Bre Asop

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Owner at MotorKitchen

I appreciate your well written report and the effort you put into it. Thank you. It takes guts! I'm sure you knew going in that you'd be met with violent opposition in the current arena. I remember these events unfolding and how questionable many of Z's actions were considered at the time. I have Ukrainian family. I can attest that not all of his countrymen view him as the Mr. Rogers media portrays. What if we step away from spoon-fed reporting and disallow disdain for Trump to overshadow our every thought? Perhaps your piece will gain momentum with those who like a valid presentation of points deserving further consideration. 🍌

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Thanks for sharing, David! Important stuff!

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NEWSLETTER SIGNUP

Stephen A. Smith changes his mind on Volodymyr Zelensky after conversation with Candace Owens


Stephen A. Smith appeared to make a complete U-turn on Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelensky live on his podcast while discussing Sunday's White House meeting with Candace Owens

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By **Daniel Blackham** 14:33 ET, MAR 5 2025 UPDATED 07:30 ET, MAR 6 2025

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 Candace Owens hit out at Volodymyr Zelensky's appearance



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uesday, Smith has been upped as a potential candidate for the 2026 Democratic ticket, with advisors continuing to talk up his possible influence.

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His conversation with Owens was a surprising twist, as Smith has previously criticized Zelensky's appearance for his failed r.

considering her right-wing views, which 1 Smith's podcast, she again continued to ng at the .

Zelensky, leader of war-torn Ukraine, appeared with Donald Trump and JD Vance to try and negotiate a peace deal, but the meeting ended without a minerals deal being signed after things went wrong in the Oval Office. Smith had taken issue with the way Trump and Vance had dealt with him, saying the pair had 'bullied' Zelensky in the White House.



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But he appeared to go back on that belief after a brief chat with Owens, who brought up the Ukrainian leader's celebrity appearances. Zelensky notably asked for a spot at [the Oscars](#) to give a brief speech about the war, but the Academy denied his request.

Owens used that to amplify her argument that Zelensky's decision not to wear a suit for Sunday's meeting was performative rather than anything else, saying: "This dude has been wearing military clothes for like five years now. Put on a suit! As soon as he gets out the car Trump was like 'oh look he's dressed up'. This should let you know, and should signal to the public, that this is an act.

"Give me a reason why he can't put on a suit. Even if you're in the midst of a war why can't you put on a suit when you're coming to ask for money? Oh, because he wants people to see him as a guy that's downtrodden in the trenches? He's not that!

"This guy has been on the cover of Vanity Fair, he's been on the cover of Vogue, he's been on the cover of Forbes, he's doing photoshoots, he did a three-hour podcast with Lex Freeman, he asked and was declined a spot to go to the Oscars a couple of years ago. This is making a



NEWSLETTER SIGNUP



 **Stephen A. Smith has changed his opinion on**

/myr Zelensky (Image: X/Twitter -The Stephen A. Smith

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Smith admitted he didn't know anything about the Oscars snub, and went on to change his opinion as a result. "Damn," he replied. "This is why people gotta be careful about messing with you, cos I was getting ready to disagree with you until you dropped those last things in.

"I didn't know he tried to go to the Oscars, I didn't know he was on the cover of Vogue, I didn't know that stuff! I honestly didn't know. Okay, that does change it."

Smith did, however, go on to explain that despite changing his view on Zelensky, he had sympathy for him given the nature of Russia's invasion and the way he's managed it. "What I will say is there is some sympathy for the fact Russia invaded his nation," he continued. "We see the rubble, we see the catastrophe that is Ukraine, we've seen Putin bombing them for crying out loud."

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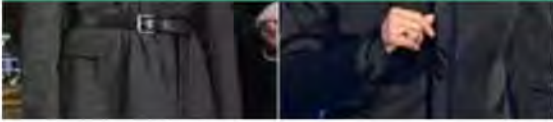
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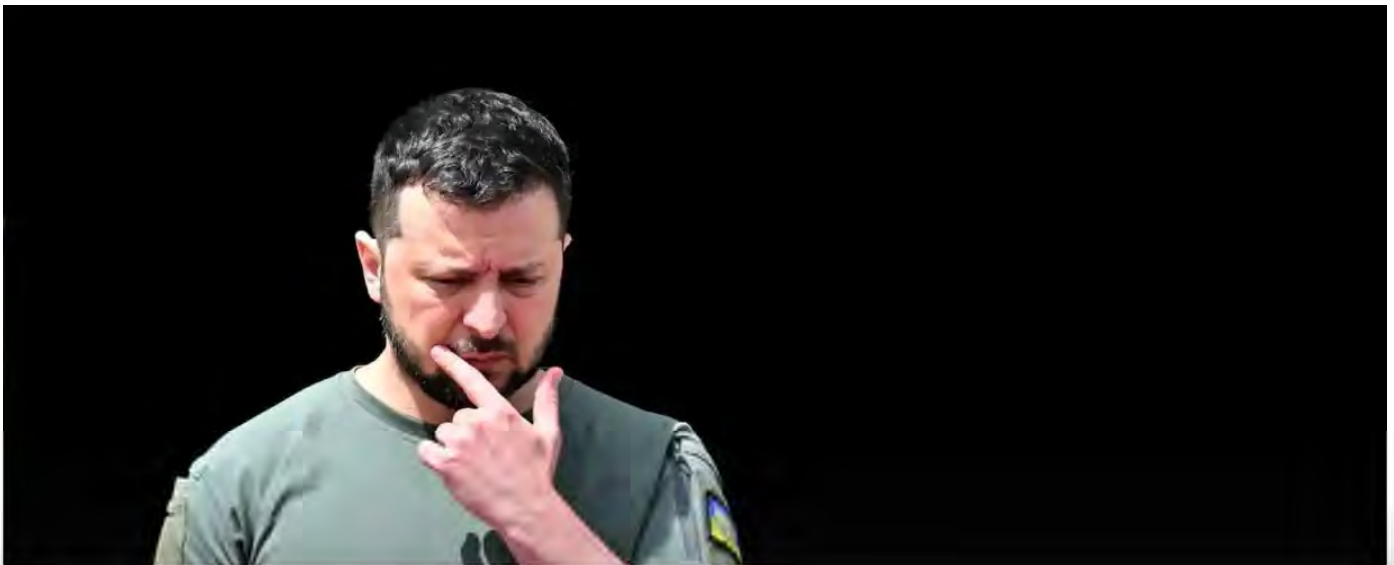


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📅 22 June 2022, 2:25pm



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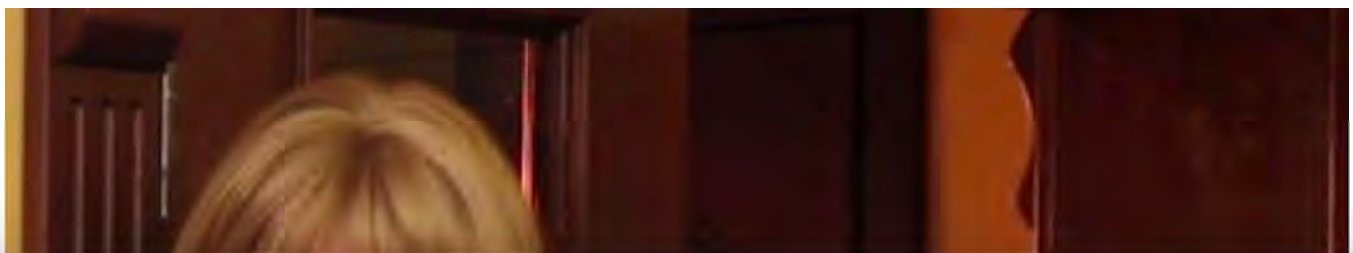
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A peculiar row has broken out in Kyiv over the role of one of Zelensky's best-known advisers. Oleksiy Arestovych is a familiar figure in Ukraine due to his (now-lapsed) work as a spokesman and developed a profile abroad, **described** as a 'sex symbol' by no less a source than the *Economist*. But when it comes to sex, he has some clear views. 'LGBT people are deviant,' he said on 19 June. 'I sympathise with them, but I am against propaganda.'

Cue outrage, with KyivPride **demanding** Zelensky fire Arestovych for homophobic statements, 'Such rhetoric from Ukrainian authorities is unacceptable if we want to be in the EU'. A reference to action that Brussels is taking against Hungary for its stance on LGBT rights. But KyivPride has another argument: that the war has demonstrated that gay Ukrainians deserve equality. 'You have no moral right to say that as long as hundreds of LGBT+ people, along with everyone else, defend Ukraine', they added.

On his Facebook page, Oleksiy Arestovych **answered** with a joke, 'The LGBT community is outraged and talking about my resignation. But look at this photo and you'll understand who should be truly outraged. I think I'm being persecuted, no? I demand tolerance'. He offered the below photo of him in drag during his career as an actor.



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The debate on LGBT rights hits a fault line in Ukrainian society – as it does in many post-Soviet countries.

A poll in May **showed** just 24 per cent of Ukrainians support same-sex marriage, up from 4 per cent six years ago. This is one of the arguments against EU membership: that it

would enforce social norms not accepted by the majority. Putin has sought to exploit this over the years, offering himself as a champion of conservative values.

Douglas Murray

The Ukrainian parliament this week passed the Istanbul Convention, intended to combat violence against women and domestic violence. This has triggered much debate on Ukrainian social media with some seeing it as a back door for gay marriage. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church said liberals are acting 'under the guise of combating domestic violence to introduce into Ukrainian legislation the

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propaganda'. By signing the Istanbul Convention, Zelensky deliberately took the risk of being criticised by the conservative masses, knowing that they see the Istanbul Convention as a Trojan horse for same-sex marriage.

In Ukraine, many same-sex couples live in stable long-term relationships. But, as in Britain 30 years ago, they have no rights. They cannot get married or inherit their partner's property, they have no right to alimony, cannot visit each other in medical institutions, and they can't adopt and raise children together. Marriage is described in the Family Code of Ukraine as 'union of a woman and a man' – this wording leaves people of the same sex with no ability to get married and deprives them of many of the rights that heterosexual couples have.

The situation is not going to change in the near future but debates about same-sex couples' rights will continue after the end of the war. Even Zelensky's signing of the Istanbul Convention came with restrictions, in a bid to see off more conservative opposition. The document **says**, 'Ukraine does not consider any of the provisions of the Convention to oblige it to amend the Constitution of Ukraine and the Family Code of Ukraine, other laws of Ukraine on the institutions of marriage, family and adoption, or to interfere with parents' right to raise their children accordingly'.

As for Oleksiy Arestovych, he is fast losing the popularity he won at the beginning of the Russian invasion (which he predicted in 2019 with striking accuracy). His later promises that the war would be over in a fortnight have seen admiration turn to mockery. Even in wartime, there is an active discussion of just how liberal – and how European a – a postwar Ukraine would be. It's a reminder Zelensky faces battles on many fronts.



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NEWS

LGBTQ+ Activists Are Protesting Ukraine's President by Throwing a Rave Outside His Office

Critics say President Volodymyr Zelensky has failed to clarify his stance on queer and trans equality.



BY JAMES FACTORA

July 27, 2021





Barcroft Media/Getty Images

If you happen to be in Ukraine and don't have plans on Friday, local LGBTQ+ activists have you covered. Advocacy groups will be gathering outside President Volodymyr Zelensky's office in Kyiv for a rave and protest.

The newly established UkrainePride will host its inaugural Rave Pride on July 30 outside the Presidential Administration Building, according to Ukranian news publication Kyiv Post. The lineup includes the electronic music acts Gael Abakarova, Katro Zauber, Olha Korovina, and Stef Mendesidis, along with headliner Nastia, and will run from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m local time.

While equality advocates initially applauded Zelensky's election in 2019, he has come under fire for failing to clarify his stance on LGBTQ+ rights. He also has declined to condemn anti-LGBTQ+ legislation drafted by his party that echoes neighboring Russia's anti-gay "propaganda" laws.

The event isn't the further time in recent years that LGBTQ+ activists have taken to the dancefloor to call out leaders who have failed the community. Prior to Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017, protesters staged a rave outside the home of former Vice President Mike Pence, who notoriously signed an anti-LGBTQ+ "religious freedom" bill into law as the governor of Indiana.

Organizers are also using the rave to demand the adoption of Bill 5488, which would establish LGBTQ+ inclusive hate crime protections in Ukraine, and demanding investigation into attacks on the LGBTQ+ community. This includes a 2019 police raid on a gay nightclub in the central Ukranian city of Dnipro, in which authorities reportedly forced patrons to lie

down on the floor for hours in the freezing cold while yelling homophobic slurs.

Prominent LGBTQ+ activists have also suffered numerous physical assaults in recent years. In just the year of 2018 alone, local advocate Borys Zolotchenko was beaten by a group of 10 men and Vitalina Koval was targeted in a chemical attack.

"Ukraine's LGBT community still suffers from unpunished attacks by right-wing radicals, which makes the country dangerous for its own citizens and unattractive for foreign guests," a statement from UkrainePride posted to Instagram concluded. "The government's inaction on violence unites us in a common desire for the rule of human rights and freedoms. Deprived of the protection of the state, we use the only effective tool of direct democracy left to us — protest."

The rave is not affiliated with KyivPride, which has organized its weeklong LGBTQ+ Pride event in Ukraine's capital city since 2016.

Pride celebrations in Ukraine outdate that organization's founding by at least a decade, however, with the first such event held in 2003. Pride events have occurred intermittently in the nearly two decades since due to intense opposition from homophobic extremists in the largely Eastern Orthodox country. The event was cancelled in 2012 and 2014, and participants in 2017 and 2019 were physically attacked by opponents of LGBTQ+ rights.

UkrainePride cofounder Sofia Lapina said that she "endlessly appreciates" the work of KyivPride in helping to pave the way for her organization. But as a former member of the group, she claimed that she and others ultimately diverged from UkrainePride due to a difference of opinion regarding tactics.

"UkrainePride is about political demand, not about community visibility," Lapina wrote in a Facebook post. "We've already worked hard enough for community visibility over the past many years, now the community should be about demand."



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Lapiina told *Kyiv Post* that she aims to capture the attention of the authorities “who pretend that nothing is happening, that there are no hate crimes.”

“At Rave Pride, we are going to play loud music in the middle of the workday at the President’s Office so that the authorities can finally hear us,” Lapiina said. “Advocacy is any action that shines a light on the violations of a person’s rights, and UkrainePride is looking for the most diverse and most creative ways [to do that].”

Get the best of what’s queer. [Sign up for them.'s weekly newsletter here.](#)



James Factora is an L.A.-born, New York-based writer and musician. Their work has also appeared in *Teen Vogue*, *Slate*, *Refinery29* and others. ... [Read more](#)



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Pope Francis condemns Ukraine's ban on Russian Orthodox Church

'Churches are not to be touched!' Pope Francis said after Ukraine approved a law banning churches tied to Russia.

[VATICAN](#) / [VATICAN NEWS](#)



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is pictured with Pope Francis during a private

audience at the Vatican in this Feb. 8, 2020, file photo. (CNS/Gregorio Borgia, Reuters pool)

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Vatican City — August 27, 2024

Following the [Angelus](#), his weekly prayer service at the Vatican, on Sunday (Aug. 25), Pope Francis criticized Ukraine's [decision to ban](#) the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has historically been tied to Russia, saying that Christians should be allowed to pray freely and that churches should not be abolished.

"In thinking about the laws recently adopted in Ukraine, I fear for the freedom of those who pray, because those who truly pray always pray for all," Francis said after the prayer service.

The pope stated that "a person does not commit evil by praying" and urged Ukrainian leaders to "let those who want to pray be allowed to pray in what they consider their Church."

"Please, let no Christian church be abolished directly or indirectly. Churches are not to be touched!" he said.

A day earlier, on Ukraine's Independence Day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed into law a long-debated bill outlawing churches affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. While the UOC has denied having any ties to the Moscow patriarchate since the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine,



the church has been suspected of promoting Russian propaganda.

Ukraine's security service has accused the UOC of acting as a platform to justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine and says its churches are havens for spies. The organization has launched criminal proceedings against at least 100 UOC clergy members, with 26 already sentenced.

Russian Orthodox clergy and Patriarch Kirill, right side of table, meet with Cardinal Matteo Zuppi and Roman Catholic delegates at the Patriarchal Residence in Danilov Monastery, in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, June 29, 2023. (Moscow Patriarchate)

A [study](#) conducted in April by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found that 83% of Ukrainians felt that the government should intervene in the activities of the UOC, while 63% supported banning the church altogether.

After some two years of discussion, Ukraine's parliament overwhelmingly passed the law by a vote of 265-29 on Aug. 20. Religious groups with ties to Russia were allowed nine months to sever their relationship with Moscow or leave the country.

Francis and the Vatican have conducted multiple diplomatic missions to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The church has made charitable contributions to the Ukrainian people while sending a papal envoy, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, to negotiate prisoner exchanges and create humanitarian corridors for refugees.

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The spokesman for the UOC, Metropolitan Klyment, told journalists after the bill was passed that the ban "will only discredit, including internationally, those who will try to do this," and compared the policy to the Soviet takeover of church properties in the last century.

The majority of Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians, but following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Metropolitan Epiphanius I of Kyiv and All Ukraine led his loyalists to form a new denomination, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. In 2019, the spiritual head of the global Orthodox Church, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, officially recognized the independent church.

The split deepened the religious dimension of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and gave Moscow Patriarch Kirill, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, cause to defend Russia's invasion, describing it as a holy war. In the territory that Russian forces occupy in eastern Ukraine, they have attempted to dismantle the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

In a video meeting with Kirill in March of 2022, Francis made an appeal for peace while warning the patriarch not to be "Putin's altar boy."

Francis and the Vatican have conducted multiple diplomatic missions to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The church has made charitable contributions to the Ukrainian people while sending a papal envoy, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, to negotiate prisoner exchanges and create humanitarian corridors for refugees.

The No. 2 official at the Vatican, Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, [traveled to Ukraine in July](#) to meet with high-level officials and religious representatives. On July 22, he met with Viktor Yelensky, head of Ukraine's agency for ethnic affairs and freedom of conscience, to discuss religious freedom issues.

With Zelenskyy's signing of the ban on Russian-affiliated churches, these diplomatic entreaties seem to have failed, pointing up the challenge Francis' peacemaking has faced since the war began. The Vatican's determination to act as an impartial arbiter in the conflict with the hope of negotiating a peace between the warring sides has primarily caused backlash from Ukrainian leaders and citizens alike.

"I continue to follow with sorrow the fighting in Ukraine and the Russian Federation," the pope said on Sunday. "Let us continue to pray for an end to wars, in Palestine, in Israel, in Myanmar and in every other region. The people are asking for peace! Let us pray that the Lord will give us all peace."

— This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. [View the full series.](#)

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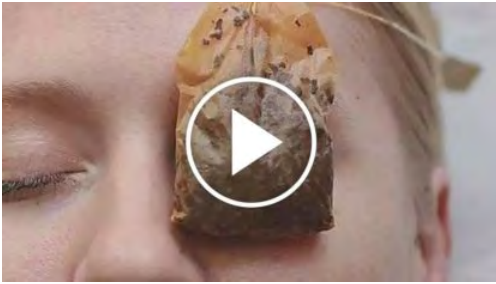


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BY CAROL GLATZ, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

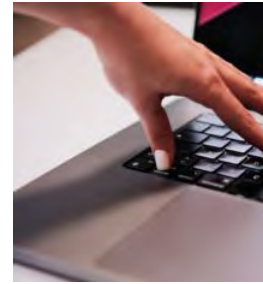
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Top Ukraine cleric pleads with Starmer for help over Zelensky's Orthodox church crackdown

Exclusive: Prime minister has been criticised for delaying his appointment of a new envoy for religious freedom

David Maddox Political editor • Saturday 19 October 2024 14:08 EDT •  Comments



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Sir Keir Starmer has come under pressure to quickly appoint an envoy for **religious freedom** after frustration over the delay to replace former Tory MP Fiona Bruce.

The row has broken out as a leading **Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)** priest has appealed to the UK for help in urging **President Volodymyr Zelensky** to end his crackdown on the church and priests in his country.

Metropolitan Arseniy, the abbot of the Dormition Sviatohirsk Lavra, was arrested

part of a wider persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by Mr Zelensky's government in the current war.

He has spoken exclusively to *The Independent* urging the UK to use its influence to stop the persecution of his church.



Metropolitan Arseniy was arrested over suspicions he was 'disseminating information about the movement or location of armed forces' to Russia (*Facebook*)

The issue was raised at a recent international conference in Berlin and has already seen concern raised by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, as well as the Foreign Office (FCDO) which has previously confirmed it is monitoring the situation in Ukraine.

However, because the UK has yet to appoint a new envoy for religious freedom, former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith criticised the government for not having a presence at the conference in Berlin.

He said: “Keir Starmer promised that ‘Labour will be a champion of religious freedom’. But after more than 100 days in office, he has still not appointed a special envoy on freedom of religion or belief.

“As a result, only last week, at an international conference in Berlin on this vital matter, attended by senior figures from 38 countries, the UK went unrepresented at a ministerial level. Our presence and our voice has never been more needed. All over the world there are growing numbers of threats to this most fundamental of human rights.”

A Downing Street spokesperson said an appointment would be made in due course.

The spokesperson told *The Independent*: “The government will retain the position of envoy for freedom of religion and belief.”

The Independent recently revealed that the Ukrainian government is attempting to have **Ukrainian MP Artem Dmytruk**, a critic over the anti-Orthodox church policy, deported from the UK.



Former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith is critical of the delay in appointing an envoy for religious freedom
(AFP/Getty)

Speaking to *The Independent*, Metropolitan Arseniy warned: “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is facing a great trial. Our holy temples and shrines have been destroyed, and our priests and parishioners are being killed in the war. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government seeks to ban the church. Priests are being wrongfully arrested, and our places of worship are being seized and taken from us.”

The Ukrainian government has turned its attention to the UOC even though many of its priests are helping the country's army on the front line against Putin's Russian forces. However, Mr Zelensky's government has accused many UOC priests of spying for Russia and claims it takes its orders from Putin ally Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, a former senior figure in the KGB.

Metropolitan Arseniy is father superior of the Sviatohirsk Lavra, one of the most famous Orthodox monasteries in Ukraine, and is being held in pre-trial detention in Dnipro, where he has been arbitrarily detained since April.

He strongly denies the accusations against him personally and the UOC that they are working for Putin.

He said: “The authorities in Ukraine unfairly accuse the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of being a mouthpiece of Russian propaganda. Nothing is further from the truth. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a one-thousand-year-old Christian denomination. Its churches and monasteries are world renowned. We do not preach any ideology. We preach the good news of God’s promise of forgiveness from sin.”



Fiona Bruce, former Conservative MP for Congleton, was the previous envoy for religious freedom (*Alamy*)

He pointed out that his monastery was closed by the communist authorities in the old Soviet Union and only reopened after its collapse with him taking the leadership in 1995.

The Ukrainian authorities turned their attention on him after he preached a sermon in September 2023 complaining about pilgrims being prevented from coming to the monastery because of the war. But he insists that his monastery has shared in the pain of Ukraine.

“We of the Sviatohirsk Lavra have suffered with our fellow Ukrainian citizens during the war. Our local parishioners fight on the front lines and our historic monastery has been badly damaged by bombing. However, the monks have persevered, and they continue to support those displaced by the conflict. Located just 15 kilometres from the front lines in Eastern Ukraine, the community provides shelter and food to those most at risk.

“Despite all the good that our monastery has done, the authorities seek to undo our hard work. The government has mounted a campaign to strip the monastery from us. Meanwhile, I have been persecuted for my faith and detained in jail.”

Describing his ordeal, he said: “In violation of the law and criminal procedure of Ukraine, I have been detained in a prison facility for nearly six months. My court hearings offer no hope of respite.

“Over the summer, I was forced to travel eight hours from where I am held in Dnipro to reach Sloviansk, the location of the court, a town close to the front lines. The vehicle often had no air-conditioning, and I suffocated in the summer heat.

“I was handcuffed for the duration of the journey and denied water and food. Once the hearings were over, I was forced to travel back to Dnipro in the same conditions.”

The harrowing journey was then repeated the following day.

He added: “I am 56, and my health is beginning to fail. Although I do not know when I will be released, I put my trust in God and will continue to speak only truth.

“I pray for this ordeal to end, for my return to Sviatohirsk, the reconstruction of our monastery, and peace in Ukraine. I pray too for an end to the attack on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We Ukrainians must be united.”

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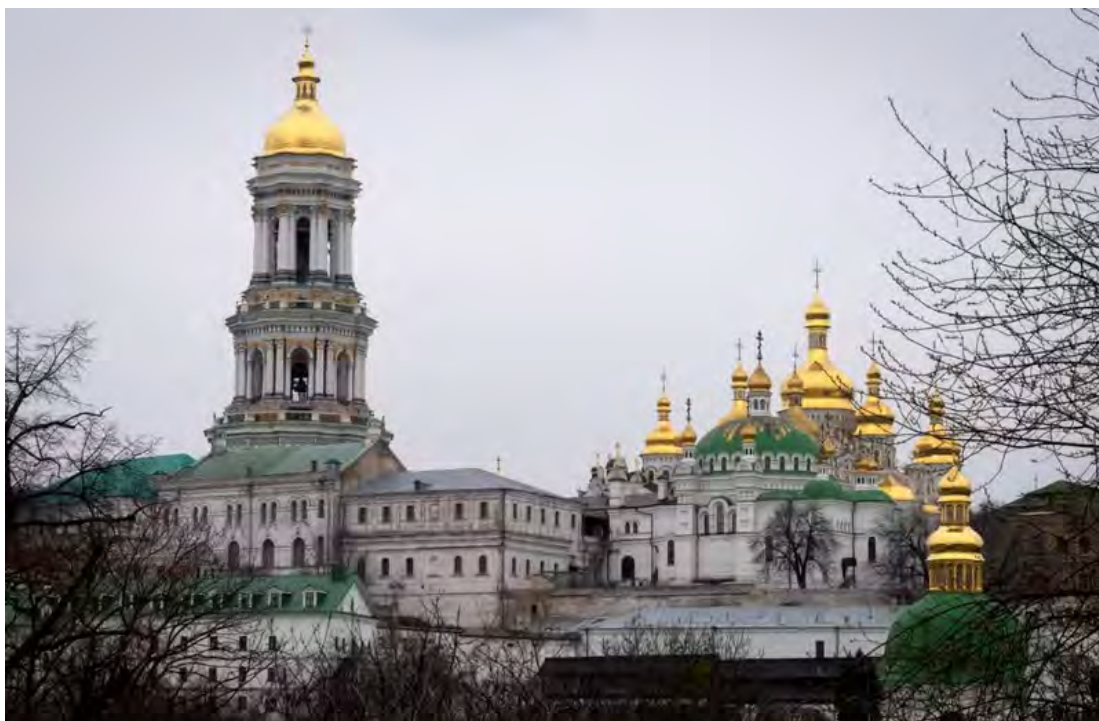
WORLD • WAR IN UKRAINE

Ukraine MPs vote to ban Russia-linked Orthodox Church

Kyiv has been trying to curb spiritual ties with Russia for years – a process that was accelerated by Moscow's 2022 invasion, which the powerful Russian Orthodox Church endorsed.

Le Monde with AFP

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The Monastery of the Caves, one of the holiest sites of Eastern Orthodox Christians, in Kyiv, Ukraine, on March 23, 2023. EFREM LUKATSKY / AP

Ukraine's parliament on Tuesday, August 20, voted to ban the Russia-linked Ukrainian Orthodox

Church, as Kyiv cuts religious, social and institutional ties with bodies it considers aligned with Moscow.

Kyiv has been trying to curb spiritual links with Russia for years – a process that was accelerated by Moscow’s 2022 invasion, which the powerful Russian Orthodox Church endorsed. A majority of MPs approved the bill outlawing religious organizations with ties to Russia, including the Russia-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which is linked to the Moscow patriarchate.

The bill needs to be signed by President Volodymyr Zelensky to come into force and will take years to implement, but still caused dismay among followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In Kyiv, believers were praying outside the Russian-affiliated part of the historic Kyiv Pechersk Lavra monastery, a normal scene since the section was closed to the public last year.

Read more [War in Ukraine: Tensions at Kyiv's Monastery of the Caves, the epicenter of religious discord](#)

The Russian Orthodox Church condemned the ban, with spokesman Vladimir Legoida writing on Telegram, "This is an unlawful act that is the grossest violation of the basic principles of freedom of conscience and human rights." Legoida said the bill creates "a legal basis for total liquidation of the parishes of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the religious community uniting the majority of Ukrainians." The spokesman warned that implementing this would "lead to acts of mass violence against millions of believers."

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, visiting Solovki monastery in northern Russia, referred to a "very difficult time when many have turned against us (...) not because we are bad but only because we are different."

'There will be no Moscow Church in Ukraine'

The schism between Ukrainian and Russian-linked Churches was triggered by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war between Kyiv and Moscow-backed separatists in the east. The Istanbul-based head of the Eastern Orthodox Church granted a breakaway wing, called the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), autocephaly – religious independence – from the Moscow Patriarchate in 2019.

The Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church officially broke ties with its Russian counterpart in 2022, but some lawmakers have accused its leaders of collaborating with Russian clergymen despite the invasion. The bill was welcomed by President Zelensky, who wrote on social media: "Today I want to note the work of the Verkhovna Rada. A law on our spiritual independence has been adopted." He added that the government would "continue to strengthen Ukraine and our society."

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"There will be no Moscow Church in Ukraine," Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's chief of staff, said on Telegram. Lawmaker Iryna Gerashchenko called the vote historic.

"This is a matter of national security, not religion," she said in a post on Telegram. In Moscow, Russian

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Ukraine was trying to "destroy (...) true Orthodoxy."

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[Ukraine's Orthodox Church, accused of Russian collaboration, is living on borrowed](#)

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